

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HELSIN 00977 130310Z
ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS HELSINKI 0977

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, FI
SUBJECT: TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES STRIKE ENDS

REF: (A) HELSINKI 884, (B) HELSINKI 967

1. AGREEMENT WAS FINALLY REACHED MAY 11 TO SETTLE STRIKES BY TECHNICAL WORKERS IN POWER PLANTS AND TELEPHONE COMPANY AS WELL AS SYMPATHY STRIKES BY FELLOW MEMBERS OF SMALL STTK TECHNICIANS UNION FEDERATION WHICH HAVE TIED UP FINNISH SHIPPING AND ENDED MOST FINNAIR DOMESTIC OPERATIONS. AS END OF STRIKE ANNOUNCED, SOME VESSELS SET SAIL MIDNIGHT MAY 11. FINNAIR OPERATIONS EXPECTED TO RESUME FULLY BY NEXT WEEK, ENDING CHAOTIC SITUATION CREATED BY 50,000 KEY WORKERS FROM ORGANIZATION NOT AFFILIATED WITH MAIN LABOR FEDERATION.

2. TERMS OF SETTLEMENT NOT YET AVAILABLE BUT PRESS ESTIMATES WAGE AND BENEFIT INCREASES IN NEW TWO-YEAR CONTRACTS RUN THREE TO FOUR PERCENT ABOVE GUIDELINES PROPOSED BY GOVERNMENT MEDIATOR LIINAMAA (INCREASING 1977 LABOR COSTS BY 13-14 PERCENT INSTEAD OF 10 PERCENT FORESEEN BY LIINAMAA PACKAGE).

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3. PRESS ALSO ESTIMATES THAT STRIKES HAVE COST TECHNICIANS 110 MILLION FINNMARKS (4 MARKS EQUALS 1 DOLLAR) IN LOST WAGES, FAR EXCEEDING CAPACITY OF STRIKE FUNDS. IN ADDITION, POWER STRIKE WHICH BEGAN MARCH 24 FORCED SHUTDOWN OF SEVERAL PLANTS, WHOSE IDLED WORKERS PUSHED UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES FOR MID-APRIL TO ALL-TIME HIGH IN HISTORY OF FINLAND - NEARLY 158,000 OR 6.9 PERCENT OF WORK

FORCE, INCLUDING 45,000 LAID OFF.

4. FURTHER EFFECT OF STRIKE, AS REPORTED REF A AND PREVIOUS, WAS TO ALIENATE LARGE SEGMENT OF PUBLIC AND CENTRAL LABOR FEDERATION, ELICIT CALLS FROM RESPECTED LABOR FIGURES FOR REVAMPING THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROCEDURES, AND INDUCE PRESIDENT KEKKONEN TO PUBLICLY QUESTION WHETHER STRIKE REMAINS VIABLE WEAPON (HELSINKI 0815). NOW THAT SPRING LABOR DISPUTES ARE ESSENTIALLY OVER, WITH TWO-TO THREE-YEAR AGREEMENTS SIGNED IN MOST SECTORS, LABOR MARKET ORGANIZATIONS MAY EXAMINE FURTHER QUESTION OF DISRUPTIVE STRIKES AND MEANS FOR MORE EXPEDITIOUSLY RESOLVING THEM. HOWEVER, PROPOSALS FOR REFORM AIMED AT GROUPS SUCH AS RELATIVELY WELL-PAID AND NON-POLITICAL TECHNICIANS MAY NOT FARE WELL IN VIEW OF STRONG WORKER-PARTY SENTIMENT AGAINST ANY LIMITATION ON GENERAL RIGHT TO STRIKE.

5. SETTLEMENT BY TECHNICAL WORKERS FOLLOWED RESOLUTION LAST WEEK OF STRIKE OF RESTAURANT AND HOTEL WORKERS. MOST INDUSTRIAL UNIONS HAVE ALREADY SIGNED NEW CONTRACTS. WITH PROGRESS BEING MADE TOWARD FORMATION OF MAJORITY GOVERNMENT (REF B), SITUATION IN FINLAND IS RETURNING TO NORMAL ON EVE OF PRESIDENT KEKKONEN'S STATE VISIT TO USSR. HOUSTON

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